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ABSTRACT

This leader's guide contains materials for conducting a 1-, 2-, or 3-hour workshop to help teachers develop techniques and classroom activities that will address and alleviate student stress resulting from the rural crisis. Resources for the 1-hour program include introductory remarks, a 28-minute videotape about how the agricultural economic crisis has affected students and staff in four Iowa schools, and a series of discussion questions relating to the videotape. The 2-hour program adds instructions for demonstrating the group relaxation technique "Sanctuary," a brainstorming session on projects to take back to the classroom (writing projects, role plays or dramatizations, puppet activities, assignments related to subject matter areas, and topics/formats for classroom meetings), and an introduction to the muscle relaxation technique "Unwinding." The 3-hour program includes directions for an hour of practicing listening skills using three suggested activities. Background information on emotional aspects of the rural crisis is included in an appendix. (NEC)

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THE RURAL CRISIS COMES TO SCHOOL

Leader's Guide for Videotape

by

Virginia Molgaard

August 1985

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Leader's Guide for Videotape

Sample Introduction to Program

"The videotape you're about to see reveals much of the pain rural Iowans are feeling today and shows how that pain comes to school. Students and staff in four Iowa schools talk about the agricultural economic crisis and what it means to them personally and in the school setting. After we've watched the tape, we'll have some time for discussion. Much of the information in the tape is also in the handout, so concentrate on watching and don't worry about taking notes."

(If this is a two- or three-hour workshop, add that activities also will be done that will provide teachers with some techniques and activities to take back to their classrooms.)

Background Information on Emotional Aspects of Crisis

See Appendix A for background information on the emotional aspects of the agricultural crisis. This may be helpful to include in your introduction if you or the participants want more of an understanding of how parental stress in farm families affects children.

This program can be done in one, two, or three hours, depending on which of the following activities you include.

After reading through this leader's guide, read the handout (*The Rural Crisis Comes to School,* FE-F-267) to familiarize yourself with what participants will be given. Information needed for some of the activities is found only in that handout.

The Rural *Crisis* Comes to School

One-hour Program

The one-hour program includes:
- Introduction (2-5 minutes)
- Videotape (28 minutes)
- Discussion questions (20-30 minutes)

Discussion Questions

1. Is personal communication, referred to by the teacher at Nashua, being dealt with in your school? The school principal and AEA specialist in Gowrie referred to the importance of spending time on the "affective domain." How do teachers in your school deal with this domain?

2. How does stoicism, referred to by one of the teachers, affect children that you know?

3. What kinds of "negative coping" do you see children or teens in your school using to deal with stress?

4. One of the youngsters whose family farm is going under talked about not being able to farm when he is through school. How do teens react when their future plans are in jeopardy?

5. What does loss of the farm and rural lifestyle mean to children/teens?

6. A student from Lohrville whose father is a banker wrote about changes in her family. What other youngsters besides farm youth are affected by the rural crisis?

7. What are the obstacles for talking about the rural crisis in the classroom?

8. Are there ways to overcome some of these obstacles?

9. How does time spent talking about the rural crisis relate to overall educational goals?

10. What extra expenses are there in your class or in your school that might be a problem for farm youth whose families are in financial stress? Are there alternatives so that students are not embarrassed by lack of money for projects and activities?

11. What symptoms have you seen in your years of teaching that seem to be signs of stress? Are you seeing any different or increased number of symptoms in farm youth in the last year?

12. A boy from Lohrville whose family is losing their farm spoke of changes he saw in his father. How does the loss of a farm affect the relationship between parent and child?

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13. What might a child or teen feel about himself/herself and his/her role as the result of losing the family farm?

14. In your own teaching situation how can you build in ways of helping students process struggles at home? (This question can be omitted for the two- or three-hour program.)

Two-hour Program

The two-hour program includes:
- Introduction (2-5 minutes)
- Videotape (28 minutes)
- Discussion (15-20 minutes)
- Demonstration of group relaxation techniques "Sanctuary" (15-30 minutes)
- Brainstorming session on projects to take back to the classroom (30-45 minutes)
- If time, muscle relaxation techniques "Unwinding" (20-30 minutes)

Two-hour Program—Detail

One problem with in-service programs is that often awareness is created about a problem but people are left with no clear ways to specifically address the problem. In a two-hour program (and especially in a three-hour program) you will have time to go beyond awareness.

After the tape and discussion, introduce the topic of group relaxation techniques. The whole class can benefit from programmed relaxation. Two techniques can be demonstrated that teachers can then use in the classroom. Students can learn to use them in other settings as stress relievers.

The first technique is designed to provide a brief retreat from daily stresses. This guided fantasy may be used in a group or privately by the student, perhaps as a tool for getting to sleep at night. Use "Sanctuary" by Tubesing and Tubesing (Appendix A in teacher handout, FE-F-267).

If time permits, the muscle relaxation technique "Unwinding," also by Tubesing and Tubesing (Appendix B in teacher handout, FE-F-267), may be used later in the program.

After the guided fantasy, divide the audience into several brainstorming groups of 5 to 12 people. Have groups refer to "Suggestions for School Activities to Help Relieve Stress" in the teacher handout (p. 2). Each group will be responsible for coming up with specific topics and formats for one of the following teaching suggestions:

1. Writing project

2. Role plays or dramatizations

3. Puppet activities

4. Assignments related to subject matter areas

5. Topics and formats for classroom meetings

Encourage teachers to come up with topics and formats that would be appropriate for their own age group. If the audience is large, assign groups according to grade levels for each teaching suggestion (e.g., three groups can discuss possible role plays—early elementary, middle school, and high school). Remind the groups that topics should relate to the rural crisis.

Allow groups to brainstorm for about 10 to 15 minutes, with one person acting as recorder. Then ask each group to share the ideas they came up with for the whole group. Encourage comments and other suggestions from the large group. End this section by summarizing projects and activities, as well as suggested topics and formats.

Three-hour Program

The three-hour program includes:
- Introduction (2-5 minutes)
- Videotape (28 minutes)
- Discussion (15-20 minutes)
- Demonstration of group relaxation techniques "Sanctuary" (15-30 minutes)
- Brainstorming session on projects to take back to the classroom (30-45 minutes)
- If time, muscle relaxation techniques "Unwinding" (20-30 minutes)
- Break
- Listening skills practice (60 minutes)

Three-hour Program—Detail

For the three-hour program follow the two-hour format, then add an hour of practicing listening skills. While most people in the audience probably recognize the importance of good listening, they may not have had practice using specific listening skills.

The following three exercises give helpers experience in trying out several important techniques that can be used later with youngsters who are under stress. Have the audience refer to the handout section "Listening Skills for Helping Children" (p. 2). Briefly go through the five techniques listed there.

Three Listening Activities:
Activity I—(15 minutes)
Divide the audience into groups of two. Members of each pair will take turns being the listener and the speaker. The speaker will take three to four minutes to describe a situation or experience he/she has recently been involved in. Tell participants to make the situation something they feel strongly about, either positively or negatively. Next, the listener responds by paraphrasing what the speaker said, including feelings beneath the surface. Then the speaker should tell the listener if he/she really understood what was being said and the feelings expressed.

Next, reverse roles, following the same steps. The leader will need to remind the pair to switch roles halfway through. Before going on to Activity II, ask the whole group for questions or comments on the preceding listening experience.

Activity II—(15 minutes)
Review, with the group, number 3 under "Listening Skills for Helping Children" in the handout (p. 2). The reason for practicing open-ended questions is that they allow the child to express thoughts and feelings more fully. Asking open-ended questions establishes rapport and closeness with the child. It lets him/her know that you really want to know and can take time to help.

Ask for examples of open- and closed-ended questions from the group. You may want to use these examples:

1. Closed: How is school going this year?
Open: Tell me about your classes this year.

2. Closed: Do you like living on a farm?
Open: What are some of the things you like best about living on a farm?

Keep the audience divided into pairs. Each person should write three open-ended questions based on one of the following situations. After each person writes open-ended questions, the pair comes together to check each other's questions. The way to evaluate these questions is "Does this question allow the youngster to respond fully and express feelings, rather than giving a one or two word response?" Allow four to five minutes for question writing and about five minutes for pairs to discuss the questions.

Situations:

1. A youngster has been misbehaving during your class, although he usually is attentive and hard working. You call him in after school, making it clear that you want to help, not punish him. What open-ended questions could you ask to find out what is bothering him?

2. A girl in your class has seemed on the verge of tears for several days. You overhear her telling a friend that her family has to leave the farm and move to another town. You find an opportunity to visit with her. What open-ended questions could you use to help her talk about her feelings?

After this activity, come together as a large group and ask for examples of good and not-so-good open-ended questions.

Activity III (15-30 minutes)
For the last exercise, have the audience divided into groups of three—a speaker, a listener, and an observer. Again, the speaker describes a recent situation (similar to Activity I), the listener responds with what he/she heard, as well as the feelings expressed. This time the listener can ask questions and make comments as the speaker is talking. After the speaker is finished and the listener has responded, the observer then comments on the following:

1. How were sensitivity and warmth expressed by the listener? (Observers can use the list under "Creating a Caring Relationship" in the handout (p. 1), including specific considerations, such as tone of voice, posture, etc.)

2. Did the listener communicate a desire to understand? How?

3. Was the paraphrase accurate? (Check with the speaker as well as the listener.)

4. Did the listener pick up on underlying feelings? Was he/she correct?

5. Did the listener use open- or closed-ended questions?

This activity should take 8 to 10 minutes. The leader will need to remind groups to allow time for speaker, listener, and observer. If time permits, members of each group can change roles. Bring the group together as a whole to answer questions and receive comments before proceeding to the close of the program.

Program Wrap-up

At the close of the program the leader should make some positive comments about the possibility for teachers to give significant help to farm youngsters and other students under stress. Many teachers entered the profession in the first place to make a difference in the lives of young people. The present crisis provides a real opportunity to reach young people who need help. Encourage teachers to continue to use the handout as a source of suggestions and referrals.

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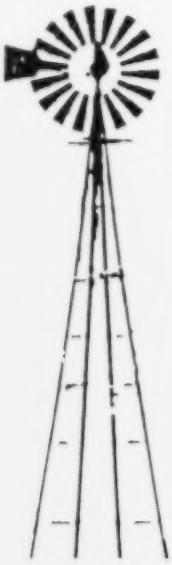

Appendix A: Background Information on Emotional Aspects of Crisis

The present rural crisis is a grown-up problem. But children and teenagers are greatly affected by the stress and strain that may be going on at home. We know from talking with farm families that the crisis starts long before the foreclosure, bankruptcy, or liquidation. News media coverage of the farm crisis, as well as knowledge of neighbors' financial plight, make clear the very real threat of loss of the family's farm.

As adults begin to face the real or threatened loss of the farm, children pick up on feelings of tension and depression in their parents. Mom and Dad may be fighting more often and more intensely than in the past. There may be less money for school activities, clothing, and family recreation.

Many of the symptoms of stress that children see in their parents are present in nonfarm families as well. Economic concerns, dissatisfaction over the job, and marital discord are frequent problems that create stress at home. High divorce and remarriage rates create difficulties for many children and teenagers. They are apt to react to any change in the family, particularly changes that cause their parents worry and pain. Skills that teachers develop to deal with stress of rural youth are useful in helping all children and teenagers handle the problems they may bring to school.

Losses Accompanying the Death of a Family Farm

One of the reasons farm families are so affected by the loss or threatened loss of the farm is that so many areas of their lives are affected. Not only is there the loss of the present means of making a living, but many farmers have no training or experience in any other job or skill. While they have used many skills within their farming operation, they may have a hard time seeing how those skills and interests can translate into a new job.

In addition to the loss of the job itself, the whole rural lifestyle is threatened. Many farmers place a strong value on the importance of raising their children in a rural setting. The thought of living in town may be almost beyond their comprehension.

Children, especially those who are young, have to learn to adjust to having their fathers gone from the home for the first time. In Dad's absence, teenagers may be asked to take over parts of the farm operation that they are not prepared to handle well.

Another major source of stress accompanying the loss of the farm is the sense of failing to keep a generational trust. Members of a three generation farm family may have felt enormous pride because they have farmed the same land for over half a century. There is a love and commitment to the land itself and the loss of the family farm may produce feelings of grief as great as the death of a family member. Youth may feel the pain of loss as well as the shame of what may seem to be their parents' failure.

There is an embarrassment factor that causes farm families to try to hide their troubles. Farm couples are often independent and proud and find it difficult to ask for help. Parents who are ashamed and depressed may discontinue social involvements in the community. Often the children are the only family members out in public. Since children continue to go to school, observant educators may be able to recognize behavior changes and help the child through these rough times.

The child may be going home to parents who are depressed, vengeful toward former lenders, suicidal, or violent toward family members. The frustration and hopelessness the parents feel can affect the child's or teenager's behavior.